

Eight Theological Mistakes According to Charles Hartshorne

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In *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) accuses traditional theology of making a number of mistakes. Although he calls the mistakes theological, they involve what Hartshorne takes to be errors about both God and the world. Corresponding to each “mistake” are Hartshorne’s proposed alternative concepts of God and the world. On page 5 of these notes is a summary of the “mistakes” and Hartshorne’s alternative proposals. Beginning on page 3 is a more detailed account of the “mistakes,” why Hartshorne views them as mistakes, and an explanation of the proposed alternatives. First, however, let us ask some questions that Hartshorne does not explicitly address: What is a theological mistake? How do you know when such a mistake has been made? How does one avoid making theological mistakes? I will attempt to answer these questions in ways suggested by what Hartshorne says about the “mistakes” he is intent on correcting.

What is a theological mistake?

The simple answer is that a theological mistake is a mistake about God. Hartshorne’s treatment of the issues makes clear, however, that he believes that mistakes about God also involve mistakes about the world and its constituents, and their nature. Hartshorne’s view is that concepts of God have implications for how we understand the universe and the creatures that make it up; conversely, concepts of the universe and its creatures have implications for how we understand the concept of God. For example, to suppose that God knows future events presupposes that there are future events to be known. It is not enough to say that God knows everything; one must also give some account of what one means by “everything.” Conversely, if the events of the world are themselves in the process of appearing in a temporal order, then it would be a mistake to suppose that God knows those events as not occurring in a temporal order.

How do you know when a theological mistake has been made?

Hartshorne employs several criteria for identifying mistakes. He insists on the twin ideas of *logical consistency* and *coherence*. At the very least, contradictions should be avoided. This is because contradictions are necessarily false, and one of the goals of theological inquiry (or any inquiry) is not to utter falsehoods. Concepts of God and the world should also not be arbitrarily conjoined but should fit together like pieces of a single puzzle. This is because one is looking for a unified conception of things that shows how they are connected, but also, in some ways, how they are disconnected. For example, the traditional dualism of mind and matter leaves their interaction a mystery; or again, “the temporal dualism” of mind emerging from the mere arrangements of material particles leaves the problem of mind as unintelligible as it found it—to use a phrase from C. S. Peirce (1839-1914).

Hartshorne thinks that theological language should *avoid equivocation*. For example, if someone says that God is good, but not good in a way that resembles what is ordinarily meant by “good,” then one literally does not know what one is talking about. It would be legitimate to ask, “If God is not good in any recognizable sense then why use ‘good’ when referring to God?” Closely related to the criterion of avoiding equivocation is that concepts of God and the world must have *positive content*. A purely negative theology (or purely negative anthropology)—saying what God (or the human) is not—is finally inadequate. As Hartshorne says, theists do not consider God worshipful simply because of the defects that God lacks, but more importantly for the positive qualities (like love and beauty) that God is thought to possess.

Hartshorne also employs *adequacy to religious experience* as a criterion. God-language has its primary home in the great theistic traditions (e.g. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam). It is true that there exist a variety of alternatives for thinking about the divine in those traditions and not everyone shares the exact same concept of God. Nevertheless, there are parameters of legitimate theological discourse. Not just anything could count as the referent of “God.” This is why Hartshorne can appeal to Scriptural traditions even though he does not view them as infallible. Even if they are not infallible, they cannot be ignored since the primary meaning of God-talk is found in them. Hartshorne’s approach is, after all, *philosophical*. He respects religion without presupposing special claims to revelation.

Because Hartshorne’s approach is philosophical he drew heavily upon, and he viewed his own reflections as a part of, the long philosophical tradition of thinking about God that dates to the ancient Greeks in the west and to philosophy in India in the east. In some cases, the philosophers were also theologians, but in other cases they were critical of theology. Hartshorne tried hard to listen appreciatively, but critically, to all of these voices.¹ Equally, Hartshorne has little patience with theological views that try to correct well-established scientific theories. Theology should not be in the business of using God as a scientific hypothesis. This is relevant to the last theological “mistake” that Hartshorne identifies—the supposed incompatibility between theism and evolution. Equally, however, scientists should appreciate that, insofar as they are engaged in the activity of science, they are not theologians or philosophers.

Hartshorne does not try to avoid all anthropomorphisms, that is to say, ascribing human-like qualities to God. It would be more accurate to say that he advocates *a disciplined use of anthropomorphisms*. The balancing act of a responsible philosophical theology is to be anthropomorphic without attributing creaturely limitations to God. One way in which this approach manifests itself in Hartshorne’s writing is that he became sensitive to the feminist critique of religious language. According to this critique, referring to God exclusively in masculine terms has the double effect—intended or not—of deifying masculinity and masculinizing deity. Theologians have always acknowledged that how

¹ Hartshorne systematically engaged eastern and western traditions of thinking about God in *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago University Press, 1953), co-authored with his former student William L. Reese.

we talk about God is important; the feminists—and Hartshorne counted himself a feminist—extend this principle to the gendered language we use to talk about God.²

How does one avoid making theological mistakes?

The criteria outlined in answer to the previous question give the basic guidelines that Hartshorne thinks must be followed to avoid making theological mistakes. It is also apparent that he thinks that one should avoid contrary extremes. Logical contraries are, by definition, propositions that may both be false. For instance, “God is in all respects unchangeable” and “God is in no respect unchangeable” may both be false. Perhaps God is changeable and unchangeable, *but in different respects*. Consider also Hartshorne’s treatment of revelation. One extreme is that human beings have been given an infallible revelation from God (e.g. in the Church, the Bible, or the Qur’an); the other extreme is that all testimony in religion is equally reliable or unreliable. Yet, both extremes could be false. Knowledge of God may be fallible, but some ways of knowing are more reliable than others.

Detailed Discussion of the Eight Theological Mistakes

1. If God is perfect then God is unchangeable.

The technical expression for God as being unchangeable in all respects is *immutability*. Interestingly, the central argument for thinking of God as immutable does not come from the Bible but from Plato’s *Republic*. Plato (427-347 BCE) argues that everything that changes must change for the better or for the worse. If it changes for the better then it is not yet perfect, but if it changes for the worse then it is no longer perfect. In either case, change implies imperfection.

Hartshorne replies that some forms of value do not admit of a maximum. Just as it is impossible to speak of a greatest possible positive integer, so it may be impossible to speak of a greatest possible beauty. The fact that Mozart’s music achieved a new level of beauty does not mean that there was nothing left for Beethoven to do. Another analogy is interpersonal relationships. We consider it a good thing to be flexible in our responses to other persons. The ideal is not unchangeableness, but adequate response to the needs of others. It is true that stability and reliability of character are desirable. But this means, in part, that the person can be relied upon to respond in ways appropriate to each situation, and responsiveness is a kind of change.

Hartshorne’s proposal is to distinguish God’s *essence and existence* (which are immutable) and God’s actuality (which is mutable). The essence of God is the divine character as supremely powerful, wise, and loving. The *actuality* of God is the particular states of this divine character as God interacts with non-divine beings. For example, a good ornithologist can identify any bird she happens to see—one could call this the

² Hartshorne was in his late eighties when he became aware of the feminist critique of theological language. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* is the first indication of how he responded to that critique.

essence of the good ornithologist. But the particular experience that the ornithologist has—say, of seeing this scissortail at this place and time—depends not upon her essence but upon the contingencies of the world. The ornithologist’s particular experience is her actuality. Analogously, God’s essence could be unchanging even as God ideally responds to a dynamic universe.

The three-fold distinction between existence, essence, and actuality also allows one to make two more distinctions within God and the creatures. As the following diagram illustrates, one may distinguish what is necessary and contingent and also what is abstract and concrete.

	<i>Creatures</i>	<i>God</i>	
<i>Actuality</i>	Woman listening to a bird singing (contingent)	God knowing the woman as listening to the bird (contingent)	<i>Concrete</i>
<i>Essence</i>	Human nature as including various cognitive capacities (contingent)	God as knowing whatever is knowable, as omniscient (necessary)	<i>Abstract</i>
<i>Existence</i>	The woman existing (contingent)	God existing (necessary)	

Note that the distinction of actuality and essence and existence is one of *logical type*. One may, for example, infer that the woman exists if she is listening to the bird, but one may not infer from the fact of her existence that she is listening to a bird. This is why it is appropriate to say that existence (or essence) is abstract relative to actuality. Actuality is, so to speak, *information rich*, relative to existence (or essence).

Hartshorne’s three-fold distinction between actuality / essence / existence also allows one to appreciate the extent of his divergence from what he calls classical theism. Classical theists say that God transcends mutable creatures by being immutable. Or again, they say that God transcends the contingency of the creatures by being thoroughly necessary.

Hartshorne finds this too simplistic. He speaks rather of God’s *dual transcendence*. God transcends the creatures by being the supreme instance of immutability *and* mutability.

Hartshorne avoids contradiction by arguing that God is immutable with respect to existence and essence, but mutable with respect to actuality. Similarly, God is both necessary and contingent, *but in different respects*. God’s existence and essence are necessary (i.e. could not be otherwise) whereas God’s actuality is contingent (i.e. could be otherwise). God’s mutability and contingency represents the divine flexibility in being able to respond to every possible change. Interestingly, Hartshorne does not disagree with

The Eight Theological Mistakes and Hartshorne's Alternatives Summarized

<i>The eight theological mistakes</i>	<i>Hartshorne's alternatives</i>
1. If God is perfect then God is unchangeable.	God's <i>essence</i> (which is abstract)—including being perfect in power, knowledge, and love—is unchanging. God's <i>actuality</i> (which is concrete) changes ideally in adequate responsiveness to the creatures. Hartshorne calls God the “self-surpassing surpasser of all.”
2. If God is all-powerful then God can unilaterally bring about any state of affairs the description of which is self-consistent.	To be real is to act and to be acted upon—in short, to interact. God is supremely powerful, but that power is always in relation to other beings with some degree of power. Thus, God cannot unilaterally bring about any state of affairs.
3. If God is all-knowing then God knows all temporal moments, past, present, and future, in a non-temporal or eternal way.	God knows the past as actual, the future as a structured array of possibilities, and the present as the process by which possibilities become actualities.
4. If God is all-loving then God loves without being affected by anything external to the divine being.	Divine love requires that God feels, with unique adequacy, the weal and woe of the creatures. God is not the unmoved mover but, in Hartshorne's words, “the most and best moved mover.”
5. If God exists, then human beings have new experiences after death (e.g. in heaven or hell). The only alternative to a posthumous career is that one “survives” only as a corpse.	Humans are unlike God in being born and dying; God alone is immortal. The creatures “live forever,” not by never dying, but by being remembered by God. In place of personal immortality, Hartshorne puts objective immortality in the divine memory.
6. If God is infallible, then any revelation of God to humans is infallible.	Being inspired by God does not confer infallibility on the one inspired. Revelation must always be humanly received and interpreted, and every human reception and interpretation is fallible.
7. Theology should accept the idea of mere insentient, lifeless, wholly unfree matter (p. 63).	The universe is a theater of interactions among ephemeral centers of creative activity, each of which has some degree, however minimal, of feeling and freedom.
8. Belief in God is incompatible with the general idea of the evolution of species (p. 83).	“Something like” evolution is derivable from belief in God. The creatures must have some degree of power of their own that is not simply the reenactment of the divine will. God makes things make themselves.

classical theism about God's existence in contrast to the existence of any particular creature: to be God is to necessarily exist, but to be non-divine is to exist contingently.

2. If God is all-powerful then God can unilaterally bring about any state of affairs the description of which is self-consistent.

Theologians have often commented on how difficult it is to define "omnipotence." Does it mean that nothing is beyond God's power? Most of those who have thought about this (Hartshorne included) conclude that it makes no sense to say that God could bring about logically inconsistent states of affairs. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), for example, denied that God could draw a circle with unequal radii, for this involves a logical inconsistency—one must fix the angle of the compass so that it doesn't move, but one must allow the angle to become wider or smaller. Aquinas also denied that God could change the past once it has occurred. Aquinas says that not even God can restore virginity to someone who has lost it. On the other hand, Aquinas apparently believed that no logically consistent state of affairs is beyond God's power to bring about.

Hartshorne points out that some logically possible states of affairs can be explained only by the activity of more than one agent. Suppose Naomi loves Ruth and Ruth loves Naomi—their mutual love can be explained only by referring to the activity of two persons, Naomi *and* Ruth. The logic of the situation does not change if one of the agents is God. The state of affairs described by God loving Ruth and Ruth loving God can only be explained by the activity of both God *and* Ruth, and not by God alone. If this is correct, then it is false that God, acting alone, can bring about any state of affairs the description of which is logically consistent.

Hartshorne takes inspiration from one of Plato's late dialogues, the *Sophist*, and says that "real being" is defined as the ability to act and to be acted upon—in short, the ability to *interact*. This is the view of reality as having a social structure. In this spirit, he interprets divine power as the ideal form of interaction with the creatures. God responds in ideally appropriate and adequate ways to the actions and behaviors of the creatures, but the creatures always retain the power to resist or to try to ignore divine calls to justice and benevolence. Although God is the eminent form of creative-responsive love, not everything that happens is God's doing. The creatures are lesser creators. Thus, God and the creatures are co-creators. (It is instructive to note that one of Hartshorne's earlier books is titled *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*.)

Hartshorne's most controversial departure from classical theism is his denial of creation *ex nihilo*. The traditional view of creation is that God creates from no pre-existing material (*ex nihilo*). Thus, one may distinguish, as it were, three stages: in stage 1, there is God existing without a universe. Since the universe is spatial, temporal, and material, one must suppose God to have a non-spatial, non-temporal, non-material form of existence. In stage 2, there is God existing as deciding that the universe will exist (in truth, this stage is only nominally different than stage 1). In stage 3, there is God and the universe or, what comes to the same thing, God existing as creating the universe.

Basically, Hartshorne acknowledges only the third stage. In his view, there is no such thing as God without a universe or, for that matter, a universe without God. Hartshorne argues that creation *ex nihilo* is merely a negative concept with no positive meaning—recall that “*ex nihilo*” means “from *no* pre-existing material.” Since theological terms must have positive meaning, Hartshorne denies the doctrine. This fits with Hartshorne’s view of reality as socially structured. God and the universe are, for Hartshorne, necessary to each other, with the proviso that no particular set of creatures (i.e. no particular universe) is necessary to God. An analogy that Hartshorne uses is of a mathematical set that necessarily has numbers, but the numbers that it has are not necessary. Furthermore, the distinction between God and the creatures is preserved: the divine being meets with no universe that it did not have a hand in co-creating whereas the creatures, because they begin to exist, are born into a universe that they had no part in making. (Of course, once the creature exists, it becomes a lesser, co-creator, with God.)

3. If God is all-knowing then God knows all temporal moments, past, present, and future, in a non-temporal or eternal way.

The seeds of the ancient debate about the extent of God’s knowledge of the future were planted in Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, part IX. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) asks whether the proposition, “The sea battle will or it will not occur tomorrow” is analogous to the proposition “The sea battle occurred or did not occur yesterday.” The second proposition is true because either “the sea battle occurred yesterday” or “the sea battle did not occur yesterday” is true. Aristotle wonders whether propositions about what will occur can have truth values.

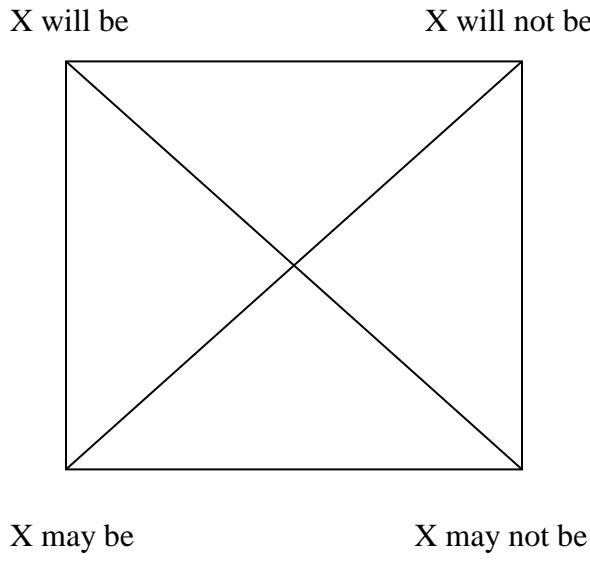
If propositions about the future—propositions of the form “X will occur”—can be true or false, then presumably, if God is supposed to be omniscient, then God would know whether they are true or false. God would know, for example, who will win the next presidential election. This knowledge would *not* be based on guess work, calculations about the political climate, voter attitudes, and the like. Rather, it would be based on something like a direct perception of what the future holds in store. Medieval philosophers compared God’s knowledge of events in time to the relation of the center of a wheel to its rim. As all of the spokes of the wheel are the same length extending from the center to the rim, so God is equally present at each moment of time—our yesterdays and our tomorrows are God’s today.

Hartshorne rejects the wheel analogy. He thinks it is more accurate to say that time is a cumulative (also, a creative) process—moment to moment adds something new to the total set of events that we call the past. Hartshorne would object to the saying that, “There is nothing new under the sun”; there was a time when the sun itself was new. The past is what *has come to be*, the future is what *may or may not come to be* given the conditions existing in the past, and the present is *the coming to be* of events. From a practical standpoint, we never face a future that has already been made. The future is not a block of inevitability. It is, rather, a field of activity for possible decisions. To be sure, not everything is possible; one cannot flap one’s arms and fly like a bird. However, our

decisions are part of what make the future what it is.³ Hartshorne maintains that it is the same for God. The difference between God and the creatures is that God has a perfect awareness of the extent to which the future is open or not open. Also, unlike human knowledge of the past, there are no blind spots in God's knowledge of the past. Likewise, God's knowledge of the present is tainted by no ignorance.

A group of evangelical Christians who call themselves “open theists” follow Hartshorne’s reasoning about divine knowledge (even though Hartshorne was neither evangelical nor Christian). They hold, with Hartshorne, the following: (i) the future is partially open; (ii) because God’s knowledge is perfect, God knows the future as partially open; (iii) God is open to creaturely influence (see the discussion of “mistake” 4). Open theists also argue that this better fits the evidence from the Bible where God often makes conditional prophecies. The Bible sometimes portrays God as saying, “If you do X, then I will do Y.” This kind of prophecy presupposes the openness of the future. Arguably, the most important divergence between open theists and Hartshorne is that they accept creation *ex nihilo*.

A note on Aristotle and Hartshorne: Aristotle seems to have denied that “will be” statements are true or false. Hartshorne, on the other hand, holds that “will be” and “will not be” are contraries and therefore, both may be false. If both are false, then the pair “may be” and “may not be” are true.



A square analogous to the traditional square of opposition can be used to illustrate the logical relations among future tense statements. “X will be” and “X will not be” are contraries in so far as they can both be false. If they are both false, then “X may be” and “X may not be” are true. If “X will be” is true, then “X may not be” and “X will not be” are false. If “X will not be” is true then “X may be” and “X will be” are false. The statement forms diagonally across from each other are contradictories. The law of non-contradiction is preserved, for only one of the following can be true: “X will be,” “X will not be,” or “X may and may not be.”

³ This is why time travel stories inevitably shatter into paradoxes. The traveler who journeys into the past should face a future whose events (because they are past) have already occurred. Indeed, if the events are genuinely past, then the decisions the traveler makes during the trip have been made before the traveler begins the journey. In essence, the traveler is fated to make the decisions that have already been made.

One finds this kind of language in *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. When Scrooge is shown the shadows of Christmas future, he asks the ghost, “Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or the shadows of the things that may be only?” Scrooge is asking, in effect, whether his fate is sealed, whether the future he has been shown is inevitable, whether there is still time for him to change his ways.

4. If God is all-loving then God loves without being affected by anything external to the divine being.

The technical expression for the idea that God is unaffected by what goes on in the world is *impassibility*. Divine impassibility also has the connotation that God experiences no emotions. The doctrine of God’s impassibility traditionally went hand-in-hand with the doctrine of God’s immutability. If God cannot change in any way, then God cannot be changed in any way. Since it is a central tenet of Christianity that God is love (I John 4:8), the idea of divine impassibility meant that God’s love must be understood in purely behavioral terms. According to traditional theology, God acts so as to promote the welfare of the creatures, but is unaffected by what happens to them. On this view, divine love, unlike human forms of love, involves neither sympathy nor empathy.

Some medieval philosophers realized that there was a tension between their belief in the goodness of God and their denial that God somehow shares in the joys and sorrows of the creatures. In the eleventh century, Anselm (1033-1109) raised the question explicitly in his book *Proslogion*: How can God be all-loving without any sympathetic responsiveness? Anselm’s answer was that we feel the effects of God’s goodness, but God feels nothing. But this *theological behaviorism* doesn’t answer the question, it only reasserts divine impassibility.⁴ Hartshorne is more blunt. He calls the impassible deity of classical theism “a heartless benefit machine.” Hartshorne affirms God’s love as involving both benevolence and feeling. Because God loves the creatures, what happens to them is felt also by God. As a loving parent suffers for a child who is ill or who has lost her way in life, so the God in whom Hartshorne believes, suffers through the misfortunes and the mischief of the creatures. Hartshorne was fond of quoting Alfred North Whitehead’s (1861-1947) statement that “God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands.”⁵

⁴ By coining the expression “theological behaviorism” I mean to draw attention to a parallel between Anselm’s kind of theology and the strict behaviorism in psychology that denies subjective states of awareness. The strict behaviorist view is that human beings are *exhaustively described* as organisms that respond to stimuli in various ways—hence, the S-R (stimulus-response) model. The alternative might be called “SER” for “stimulus-experience-response” where experience plays an explanatory role in responses.

⁵ See Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, edited by Donald W. Sherburne and David Ray Griffin (New York: Free Press, 1978): 351. From the beginning to the end of his long career Hartshorne used “God is love” as his guiding intuition in philosophy. In 1934 Hartshorne wrote to E. S. Brightman, “I intend to have that much originality that I will make all concepts get their meaning from that axiom [i.e. *deus est caritas*].” See *Hartshorne and Brightman on God, Process, and Persons: The Correspondence, 1922-1945*, edited by Randall E. Auxier and Mark Y. A. Davies (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001): 14. In 1991 he wrote, “My ultimate intuitive clue in philosophy is that ‘God is love’ and that the idea of God is definable as that of the being worthy to be loved with all one’s heart, mind, soul, and entire being.” See *The Philosophy of Charles Hartshorne*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991): 700.

It is worth noting that, on Hartshorne's view, there can be tragedy, even for God. As Martha Nussbaum argues, tragedy can happen only to someone who cares enough about others to be disappointed by them or hurt by what happens to them. God, in Hartshorne's view, is one who cares and who can therefore be disappointed or hurt by the actions of the creatures. Hartshorne's view of power as shared by God and the creatures entails that the creatures have some power of their own, independent of God, by which they can affect God. What happens in the universe is not decided by God alone.

We may add a consequence of Hartshorne's views which he does not specifically discuss, but which has practical value. The true depth of divine power, on Hartshorne's view, is not God's ability to manipulate events to the best possible outcome, but to be able to bear the suffering of the creatures without being overcome by it. God is forever seeking ways to bring good from the world however bad things may get. In the language of William James (1842-1910), Hartshorne's God is neither a pessimist (thinking that things can't get better) nor an optimist (thinking that things are for the best), but a kind of *cosmic meliorist* (thinking that things can get better). Of course, this requires the view of time as an open-ended process, which we have seen is Hartshorne's view.

5. If God exists, then human beings have new experiences after death (e.g. in heaven or hell). The only alternative to a posthumous career is that one "survives" only as a corpse.

Hartshorne points to the Bible's book of Job as an example of how it is possible to worship God without believing that one will survive death. Nevertheless, in the popular imagination, belief in God and belief in personal survival of death go hand in hand. Belief in the afterlife usually takes one of three forms: disembodied existence (existing without a body), reincarnation (existing in a new body, reborn into the world), resurrection of the body (existing in a body specially recreated by God). Disembodied existence is the sort of afterlife that some Greek thinkers (like Socrates and Plato) imagined. Reincarnation or rebirth has been a common idea in Eastern philosophy, especially in the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Resurrection of the body was first thought of by the Persians, the Zoroastrians, and it began appearing in some Jewish literature. Christians and Muslims expanded this view to include new places where the body would be resurrected, in heaven (as a place of permanent reward), in hell (as a place of permanent punishment), or in purgatory (as a place of punishment that prepares the person for heaven). Each of these views of the afterlife entails that the person one was during one's lifetime continues to exist after the body becomes a corpse.

None of these views command universal assent from the religious, and none of them can be shown to be true. They are usually taken as objects of faith. Some religious people consider the concept of heavenly rewards and hellish punishments as necessary motivations to keep people good or to prevent them from being bad. It may be true, as a matter of empirical fact, that people are so motivated. But this is a serious misunderstanding—unhappily shared by many—of the basic teachings of the theistic religions (e.g. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam). The ethical precept of these religions is decidedly not "Look out for yourself." Rather, the precepts enjoin the believer

to care for others and, above all, to love God. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) made the important distinction between “Doing good *in order to get a reward*” (which is inconsistent with theistic belief) and “Doing good *in order to be worthy of a reward*” (which is consistent with theistic belief). The 8th century Muslim mystic Rabiah (d. 801) understood this distinction when she prayed: “Lord, if I love thee for rewards in heaven, bar me from the gates of paradise. If I love thee for fear of punishments in hell, cast me into its flames. But if I love thee for thine own sake, hold nothing from me.”

Hartshorne does not dispute the views of Kant or of Rabiah on the proper motivations for being good, but he denies that we have what he calls “careers after death.” One can distinguish empirical, metaphysical, and ethical aspects of Hartshorne’s denial of personal survival.

- The empirical aspect is that the evidence for survival of death is slender at best, and empirical evidence for an *everlasting* postmortem existence is impossible.
- The metaphysical aspect is two-fold: (i) human individuality, unlike divine individuality, is incapable of infinite variations without collapsing into utter boredom—Hartshorne calls this the aesthetic meaning of death (a popular variation of this is the cartoon image of winged spirits sitting around on clouds listening to harp music for eternity); (ii) the afterlife would not solve the problem that it was intended to solve without depriving the creatures of their freedom—afterlives are invariably elaborately orchestrated affairs, completely controlled by divine power; but we have seen that Hartshorne denies this concept of divine power.
- The ethical aspect is the one already mentioned in connection with Kant and Rabiah. Belief in the afterlife is irrelevant to the worship of God. The proper role of the believer is to serve God, not to expect to be served by God.

Hartshorne insists that his view does not entail that being dead is simply a matter of being a corpse. It is true that one’s body becomes a corpse. No one denies that. But if Hartshorne is correct, everything that one has accomplished in life is retained in the unblinking memory of God. The importance of living in the memory of others as a way finding significance to one’s life is an ancient theme. One finds it in the Bible, especially the Jewish Scriptures, but also in Plato (specifically, in *The Symposium*). In modern times, the little known psychologist Andras Angyal (1902-1960) used to say that we live most fully when we live in the fond regard of others. Hartshorne argues that we are eventually lost to human memory, but never to the divine memory, which he, with Whitehead, interprets as the storehouse of accomplished truth and value in the universe. Hartshorne was fond of quoting a statement from a Jewish ritual, “May God endow our fleeting days with abiding significance.”

6. If God is infallible, then any revelation of God to humans is infallible.

The problem of authority in religion is vexing, for there is no end of religious people claiming authority and even infallibility (i.e. inability to err) for a particular tradition, person, office, or book. The problem is only aggravated by the fact that communities that claim authority for a particular revelation often begin to disagree about the proper interpretation of the revelation. Consider the variety of Christian groups that take the Bible as authoritative. Do they always agree with each other about the proper interpretation of the Bible? Clearly not. The same can be said of Muslims and the Qur'an. The moral we may draw from this observation is that having an infallible revelation does not guarantee that one has an infallible interpretation of that revelation. As Hartshorne says, having an infallible revelation from God does not entail an infallible human reception of that revelation. Indeed, being fallible (i.e. prone to error) is a hallmark of human cognitive faculties. Every putative revelation from God is filtered through and perhaps distorted by human reception, communication, and transmission.

Hartshorne is most severely critical of fundamentalist religion with its claim to have *an inerrant authority* in the Bible (or, in the case of Islam, in the Qur'an).⁶ In order for any humanly written book to be inerrant, the human element would have to be subtracted. God, in inspiring a person to speak “the word of God,” would temporarily have to make the person into a kind of zombie, suspending his or her specifically human qualities that make one prone to error. We have already seen that Hartshorne rejects this view of divine power. To have power over another is to have power over another being that retains some power of its own. Hartshorne thinks that it is a form of *idolatry* (i.e. worship of a false deity) to believe that any humanly written book is the perfect word of God.

Hartshorne insists on navigating between two extremes where revelation is concerned. One extreme is that there is a humanly accessible infallible revelation from God. The other extreme is that there is no revelation from God. Hartshorne accepts neither of these views. He gives some credence to the mystics for giving us some insight into the divine reality. But he is also convinced that natural theology, which is to say, human reasoning about God, can also yield insight into the divine reality; *Omnipotence* is itself an extended argument for thinking of God in certain ways. In the final analysis, Hartshorne is open to multiple ways of knowing about God, none definitive in itself, but none completely uninformative. The project of knowing God and of knowing about God is as complex and fraught with possibilities for error as the project of knowing anything.

7. Theology should accept the idea of mere insentient, lifeless, wholly unfree matter.

The concept of matter, or of what it means for something to be physical, has a varied history. Many philosophers and scientists have spoken on the topic, but there is a surprising lack of consensus. Depending on the philosopher or scientist, one gets different

⁶ It is interesting that ancient Christian creeds, like the Apostle's, the Nicene, the Chalcedonian, or the Athanasian, did not mention belief in the Bible. The idea of making *belief in the Bible* a defining characteristic of Christianity is a relatively recent phenomenon. If one looks at J. Gordon Melton's three volume *American Religious Creeds*, one finds that the creeds of fundamentalist organizations almost invariably mention belief in the inerrancy of the Bible *before* mentioning belief in God. Traditional Christianity, on the other hand, found the word of God expressed in the Bible, but did not view the Bible itself as the word of God. That honorific title is reserved for the person of Jesus (see John 1:1, 14).

answers to questions like, “Are there essential characteristics of matter? “What are (is) the essential characteristic(s) of matter?” “What kinds of properties can matter have?” Aristotle, for example, spoke of “prime matter” as having no characteristics, essential or otherwise. It is the principle of potentiality at the base of all things—for Aristotle, “substance” is composed of prime matter with an element of form (hence, Aristotle’s hylomorphism: *hyle* = matter; *morphe* = form).

More recently, in the early modern period of philosophy, the highly influential philosopher, mathematician, and scientist, René Descartes (1596-1650) claimed that matter is *essentially extended*, that it can be cut into pieces. Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), an equally eminent philosopher and mathematician, disagreed, saying that extension is the relation between substances, not a property of the substances themselves. Or again, Descartes maintained that matter, or any arrangement of matter, is incapable of having mind-like properties; in Descartes’ view no physical thing can have experiences, emotions, or beliefs. Others have disagreed. Interestingly, many have accepted Descartes’ view that matter *can exist without mind-like properties*. Many philosophers and scientists maintain that some physical things do not have mind-like properties and some do. In the former category would be things like elementary particles, atoms, molecules, space dust, rocks, planets, and plant life. In the latter category would be things like different varieties of fish, amphibians, and mammals.

Hartshorne’s view, which is indebted to Whitehead’s metaphysics, incorporates elements of each of the aforementioned views. Following Leibniz and Whitehead, Hartshorne distinguishes the basic constituents of the universe (which Hartshorne calls dynamic singulars) and the various ways these constituents are organized into “wholes” to form the objects of our experience.⁷ In Hartshorne’s theory, all dynamic singulars have mind-like qualities. However, Hartshorne also follows Leibniz and Whitehead in arguing that mind-like qualities exist along a continuum from the simplest feelings to the most complex thoughts. Thus, Hartshorne does *not* hold that every dynamic singular is a self-conscious being. Indeed, self-conscious experience is very rare for localized beings; it is confined to animals with higher brain function. Most dynamic singulars exist in a state of “stupor” (to use Leibniz’s expression). Finally, by distinguishing between the parts and the wholes of material objects, Hartshorne can agree with the idea that some physical things (i.e. some physical wholes) do not have mind-like qualities and some do. Leibniz spoke of some physical wholes as having a “dominant monad”; in more modern vocabulary, this means that some physical systems are organized so as to channel the experiences of the dynamic singulars (the parts) into a single stream of experience or even conscious experience (as in the case of animals with complex central nervous systems).

⁷ Hartshorne also often uses Whitehead’s vocabulary for parts and wholes. The metaphysically elementary particles Whitehead called “actual entities” (because they are “active”—their activity consists in responding to the influence of other actual entities and acting on other actual entities); a whole, or collection of actual entities is called a nexus; if a nexus exhibits what Whitehead calls social order, it is called a society. Social order refers to the inheritance and transmission by the actual entities that make it up of a common element of form throughout the whole—the ordinary objects of our experience such as rocks, plants, animals, and people are societies in this sense.

Hartshorne adopts Whitehead's word "prehension" as the generic term for mind-like qualities. Whitehead eventually used "feeling" as a synonym for "prehension," but he wanted to suggest that feelings come in an infinite variety, from the most primitive to the most advanced of self-reflection in the human mind. Hence, prehension is a special case of, but not the same as, apprehension (conscious experience). Prehension is a "grasping" of other entities (cf. a monkey's prehensile tail that grasps the branch of a tree) into the unity of a new experience. Implicit in the idea of prehension is the idea of at least a minimal degree of freedom. How a dynamic singular feels its world is not entirely determined by the world itself. But just as feeling comes in infinite varieties, so freedom may exist in many forms. The human form of freedom, often called "free will," is a very specialized and rare form that involves conscious awareness.

Hartshorne argues by analogy that feeling can be everywhere even though not everything feels, somewhat as vibration can be everywhere but not everything vibrates. Another analogy of the whole/part relation that Hartshorne uses is this: there is feeling in a flock of birds (i.e. in the birds themselves) even though the flock as a whole does not feel. Hartshorne views plants as having no feeling, but he attributes feelings to their individual cells. Thus, the movement (heliotropism) by which a flower tracks the sun is a function of the movements of the cells and not the plant as a whole. On the other hand, Hartshorne's theory entails that in a conscious being the feelings of the cells are summed up in the feelings of what we often refer to as the self. As Hartshorne says, hurt my cells and you hurt me.

Matter-Energy of the Universe

	Parts (Dynamic Singulars)	Wholes (Nexus / Societies)
Things with mind-like qualities	Every dynamic singular has feeling (prehension), responding to and acting on other dynamic singulars.	Wholes that funnel the several parts of a system into a stream of experience, in more complex systems, conscious experience.
Things with no mind-like qualities	Nonexistent	Wholes lacking the type of complexity that can support streams of higher order experience

Schematic of Hartshorne's Psychicalism

In the past, Hartshorne's theory would have been called panpsychism (*pan* = all; *psyche* = soul). Early in his career, Hartshorne used this word, but he decided that it has the unwanted connotation that all physical wholes have mind-like qualities. Thus, he came to

refer to his view as *psychicalism*. David Ray Griffin (b. 1939), a philosopher who agrees with Hartshorne's view on this subject, uses the word *panexperientialism*, and Hartshorne did not object to that expression.⁸ Hartshorne argued that his psychicalism is more in keeping with the deliverances of modern physics and modern biology. Modern physics, since Albert Einstein (1879-1955), teaches the interchangeability of matter and energy. The world that exists beneath the level of our sensory awareness is buzzing with activity; nothing remains absolutely static; moreover, modern biology teaches that nature has a seemingly endless fertility in producing novel forms of matter-energy and life. What Hartshorne's (or Whitehead's or Griffin's) theory adds to this picture is to map mind-like qualities onto this activity. These qualities are never entirely absent from nature, but with new arrangements of matter-energy there can develop new forms of mind as well. It is worth noting that Hartshorne's theory parallels the theory of the French priest-geologist-paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).⁹

Hartshorne clearly believes that the concept of mere insentient, lifeless, wholly unfree matter is a mistake. But in what sense is it a specifically *theological* mistake, an erroneous conception of God? Hartshorne's actual words are these: "theology should not accept the idea of mere insentient, lifeless, wholly unfree matter" (p. 63). The three views on the question of matter that Hartshorne takes most seriously are *dualism* of mind and matter, *materialism*, and *psychicalism*. The fact of evolution makes dualism problematic: mind or experience, in the sense that dualism recognizes, is a late-comer in the evolutionary process. Thus, dualism must explain the emergence of mind from matter-energy, or at least explain why creatures with minds begin to appear in evolutionary history. Materialism has a similar problem, for it must explain the appearance of creatures with mind-like qualities in a world made only of mindless matter-energy. If mind and matter-energy are separate (dualism) or if something like mind emerges in evolution, then there is the problem of what Hartshorne calls "temporal dualism."

Hartshorne thinks that the workable alternatives boil down to materialism or psychicalism. But materialism is implicitly atheistic since it recognizes mindless matter-energy as the basic metaphysical principle by which all else must be explained. Hartshorne believes that psychicalism leads one to a theistic metaphysic. Even if that is not necessarily true, it still seems to be the case that psychicalism leaves open the possibility of a theistic metaphysic. These are the reasons that Hartshorne thinks that theology should reject the concept of matter devoid of mind, but he also accepts psychicalism for reasons that extend beyond strictly theological considerations.

8. Belief in God is incompatible with the general idea of evolution of species.

If the general idea of the evolution of species is incompatible with belief in God, then there are solid grounds to be an atheist. This is because the general idea of evolution of

⁸ Griffin's most complete statement on these problems is *Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁹ See Donald Wayne Viney, "Teilhard and Process Philosophy Redux," *Process Studies* 35/1 (Spring-Summer, 2006): 12-42.

species is pretty well universally accepted as factual by practicing scientists. There are disagreements about the specific mechanisms driving evolution and their relative importance, but the fact of evolution is not in doubt. It became increasingly clear—sometimes painfully clear—to 19th century scientists prior to the works of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) that some kind of developmental process had taken place over vast stretches of time. Astronomy and astrophysics revealed a universe of immense size and age. It was known prior to Darwin that light from distant stars must have been traveling for millions of years to arrive on earth. It was also acknowledged that geological forces had been working for eons to create the land forms we see today. Finally, paleontology was uncovering in the clearest possible way that species had come and gone through the ages and that the appearance of human beings was very late in geologic time.¹⁰

There were evolutionary theories preceding the theory of Darwin and Wallace. Darwins' grandfather, Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), promoted evolutionary ideas as did the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and the Englishman Robert Chambers (1802-1883). All of these theories faltered on the question of the mechanism of evolutionary development. Indeed, Darwin did not like to use the word "evolution" for his theory since it was too closely associated with the theories of his predecessors. Darwin and Wallace (co-discoverers of modern evolutionary theory) hit upon the idea of *descent with modification through natural selection*—nature "selects" species for survival based upon their adaptations to particular environments. The theory was later buttressed when Gregor Mendel's (1822-1884) discovery of genetics was rediscovered and made part of mainstream science. (Mendelian genetics gave a far superior theory of inheritance of characteristics than did Darwin's own theory of a blending of parental characteristics in the offspring.) The expression, "neo-Darwinian synthesis," refers to the combination of Darwin's theory of descent with modification and modern genetics. There exist unsolved problems in the neo-Darwinian synthesis, but its explanatory power is not doubted by practicing scientists. Scientifically speaking, it is the "only game in town" if one is looking for a theory that is testable in a variety of ways. The often heard claim that evolution is not testable is false; what many fail to appreciate is that it is not the general theory that is subject to test but specific hypotheses generated by the theory.

The question that Hartshorne raises is whether the general idea of evolution of species is incompatible with belief in God. There can be no question that the theory is incompatible with certain ideas that entail belief in God. For example, *if* one is committed to a doctrine of biblical authority and *if* one is also committed to an interpretation of Genesis according to which the universe is no more than a few thousand years old *and* that Adam and Eve were the first humans *and* that they were contemporary with all animal species, then one's belief in God is inconsistent with belief in evolution. Unhappily, these ideas also put one's beliefs in competition with well-established theories in astrophysics which

¹⁰ The consternation that these discoveries caused is poignantly expressed in Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, published in 1849, ten years before Darwin's *Origin of Species*. In canto 56, Tennyson responds to the idea that God cares for species: "'So careful of the type?' but no. / From scarped cliff and quarried stone / She cries, 'A thousand types are gone: / I care for nothing, all shall go'."

teach us that the universe is billions of years old. But that's a lot of "ifs" and "ands"; for example, one could accept biblical authority but deny the interpretation of Genesis that puts it at odds with evolution—many do this. Or again, one could accept biblical authority but deny that the Bible was intended to give us scientific truths—many do this. Or again, one could deny the authority of Bible but retain belief in God—many do this. Because of these options, it is *provable false* that belief in God is incompatible with the evolution of species. It is decidedly not belief in God *per se* that is incompatible with evolution but only certain very specific claims about the Bible and its interpretation.¹¹

We may learn a lesson from history on these questions. No sooner had the theory of Darwin and Wallace been made public than philosophers, scientists, and theologians began to reflect on its implications for religious belief. Darwin himself did this. Some are surprised to learn that it was not the theory of evolution that caused Darwin to be skeptical about Christianity. He was skeptical on independent grounds. He doubted the divine inspiration of the Bible and he was deeply troubled by animal suffering—couldn't an all-powerful God have created a world with less suffering? Others, like Darwin's American colleague, the botanist Asa Gray (1810-1888), converted to a belief in Darwinian evolution but retained their religious beliefs. Gray, a Presbyterian, held that evolution is the method God uses to create. The English clergyman, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), accepted evolutionary theory and spoke of God creating a natural world that "makes things make themselves."¹² The fundamental idea behind these theories that reconcile science and religion is that biological evolution may tell us how the human group came to exist but it does not answer the questions that are of religious interest: (i) Is there a divine power behind or within nature's processes? (ii) How should we live our lives? (iii) What is the value of human life? (iv) Are we children of God? (v) What is the destiny, if any, beyond this life?

Hartshorne takes a stronger position. He claims not only that belief in God is compatible with evolution, but also that evolution in a sufficiently broad sense is implied by belief in God (p. 83). Hartshorne's argument for this claim brings us full circle to the second theological mistake. Recall that Hartshorne maintains that the concept of God as having all the power in the universe is tantamount to the denial that other real things exist (for "real being" is defined as "the power to act and to be acted upon"). In order to affirm the existence of other beings besides God, one must grant to other beings some power.

¹¹ The argument of this paragraph applies *mutatis mutandis* to Muslims and the *Qur'an*.

¹² To the best of my knowledge, the first person to use this form of expression was Jules Lequyer (also spelled Lequier) (1814-1862) who wrote without knowledge of Darwin's ideas. Lequyer spoke of "Dieu, qui m'a créé créateur de moi-même" [God, who created me creator of myself]. See Jules Lequier, *Oeuvres complètes*, edited by Jean Grenier (Neuchâtel, Suisse: Editions de la Baconnière, 1952) : 70. Hartshorne quotes this phrase from Lequyer on the opening page of *Omnipotence*. Hartshorne introduced Lequyer to English speaking readers in *Philosophers Speak of God*: 227-230. For more English translations of Lequyer and a biography see: *Translation of Works of Jules Lequyer*, edited and with an introduction by Donald W. Viney (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998) and *Jules Lequier's Abel and Abel followed by Incidents in the Life and Death of Jules Lequier*, translation by Mark West and biography by Donald W. Viney (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999). The most complete account of Lequyer's life and thought in English is Donald W. Viney, "Jules Lequier (Lequier) (1814-1862)" *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/lequier/> (September 18, 2013).

Kingsley's phrase about God making things make themselves closely anticipates Hartshorne's views. Hartshorne seems to hold that the self-making of the creatures is implicitly a developmental concept. As we have seen, for Hartshorne, creation, including self-making, is never *ex nihilo*. One is partly made by the decisions of others and one partly makes oneself by one's reactions to the decisions of others. If the process is cumulative, then there is development. If this idea is applied to groups of individuals (to species, for instance), then the general idea of evolution is approximated.

But what of the idea that so troubled Darwin? Every creature survives only at the expense of others. One of the many examples that bothered Darwin is the ichneumon wasp that lays her eggs inside living caterpillars so that her larvae will have fresh meat rather than decaying flesh upon which to feed. What is even more disturbing is that life forms that we would usually count as "lower" live at the expense of the suffering of "higher" life forms. The life cycle of the tiny fluke worm parasite includes living on the internal organs of snails, beginning with the non-vital organs so as to prolong the feast; having finished with the snail, it makes its way to the pond's edge and is eaten by ox and sheep which then contract "sheeprot," as the worm does to the larger animal what it had done to the snail; the fluke worm's larvae make their way back to the pond to begin the cycle again.¹³ Is this what one would expect in a world created by a deity that is perfect in power, knowledge, and goodness?

This is one aspect of what philosophers call the "the problem of evil" or perhaps more accurately, "the problem of suffering." It is important to understand that the problem of suffering dates at least to the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans.¹⁴ It is not a product of belief in evolution, although the evidence for evolution, such as the examples cited above, aggravates the problem. A decade before Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Tennyson wrote these famous lines in canto 56 of *In Memoriam* (see above, note 9):

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law—
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed—

The brutality of nature as revealed by science—"Nature, red in tooth and claw"—troubled Tennyson as it troubled Darwin. Note that the problem as Tennyson describes it does not concern specifically human acts of cruelty or depravity. It concerns the workings of nature apart from human beings which traditional theology attributed to God's design. According to this view, the ichneumon wasp and the fluke worm were part of God's

¹³ I took these two examples from John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Properly speaking, the ancient and medieval philosophers and theologians were more concerned with the problem of justice than the problem of suffering. That is to say, they recognized that, all too often, good people suffer injustice and bad people seem to escape accountability for their deeds. They struggled with how to reconcile these facts with a belief in an all-powerful God who prizes justice. The problem of suffering takes more prominence the more one acknowledges the value in nonhuman life and the disvalue of animal suffering. Thus, Darwin was greatly disturbed by the suffering that is at work in evolutionary development and he could not see how to make this consistent with an all-powerful but benevolent God.

providential benevolence, even though this “design plan” seems anything but benevolent. (The wasp and the worm might see it that way, but probably not the caterpillars, the snails, and the sheep.)

In a world-view enlarged by the perspectives of cosmic and terrestrial evolution, some of the traditional answers to the problem of suffering have become untenable. Augustine, for example, held that all suffering is punishment for sin or a result of sin. Of course, Augustine traced sin to its beginnings in the Garden of Eden when Eve and Adam were disobedient to God through the temptation of the serpent, which Augustine, following Christian tradition, identified as the fallen angel, Satan. Nature itself bears the marks of that “original sin” as the nonhuman creatures must live at the expense of one another. Augustine’s theory strains credibility, for it entails that suffering in the nonhuman world is a result of human sin. Yet, modern science teaches that there were millions of years of evolution, and hence suffering, before human beings appeared on the earth. Nor is this simply a deliverance of evolutionary theory. As we have seen, Tennyson, and every other enlightened Victorian, was aware of the problem before Darwin’s theory became known. The idea of an original paradise in which sentient creatures existed but in which no creature lived at the expense of another finds no support in science; it is quite the opposite; nature has always been “red in tooth and claw.”

One does not need modern science to critique Augustine. The book of Job in the Old Testament is arguably the most extended critique in the Bible of the view that all human suffering is punishment for sin. Job is a righteous man who suffers. He proclaims his innocence (i.e. that his suffering is disproportionate to anything he deserves), and when God appears in the whirlwind in the penultimate scene, Job’s innocence is not called into question. But Job never learns why he suffers. Of course, the reader of the book of Job is privy to the reason Job suffers, or at least the reason given by the author of the prologue. But it requires a lot of exegetical gymnastics to generalize from this curious case and argue that everyone suffers because God and Satan are making bets in heaven about whether each of us will endure suffering without resorting to blasphemy.¹⁵ The larger point is that, even apart from belief in evolution, there is reason to call into question Augustine’s theory.

We have already outlined Hartshorne’s objections to the traditional view of divine power (“omnipotence” is the one “theological mistake” mentioned in the title of his book). According to the metaphysics for which Hartshorne argues, a world with many agents,

¹⁵ In *Shaking a Fist at God: Struggling with the Mystery of Undeserved Suffering* (Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1995), Katherine Dell argues that (a) the prologue-epilogue of Job were written earlier than the central poem, (b) the answers to the problem of undeserved suffering are different in the two parts, and (c) the author of the poem is criticizing the ideas about suffering contained in the prologue-epilogue. The prologue explains Job’s suffering in terms of a wager made between God and Satan. In the epilogue, Job’s faithfulness is rewarded by having Job’s fortunes returned to him and by being awarded a new family. The poem knows nothing of these events. It persists in the realism that the ultimate causes of suffering are hidden from view. As noted above, even the “answer” given to Job by God from the whirlwind is a *non sequitur* as far as the specific causes of Job’s sufferings are concerned. The wager between God and Satan is not mentioned and Job is as ignorant of the reasons for his sufferings as when the evils first befell him and his family.

each pursuing its own ends, is a world in which risk is inevitable. No one, not even a divine being, could be in a position to guarantee what will occur in such a world. It does not follow from this view that God is powerless, for on Hartshorne's view, one way in which God is distinguished from all non-divine creatures is that God acts upon and is acted upon by every creature. Every non-divine being is localized within the universe and is limited in time. To be a creature is to begin to exist in a certain place and, eventually, to cease to exist. No creature could possibly act upon its forebears or on those beings far distant from it in space. For example, Aristotle could not influence Socrates since he lived after Socrates. And no creature can be acted upon by those beings who are its descendants or those who are far distant from it in space. For example, Socrates could not be influenced by Aristotle, who lived after him. Thus, there is a difference *in principle* between God's scope of interaction and that of any creature.

On Hartshorne's view, God's role in the economy of the universe is to guarantee a cosmic order, which God is able to achieve because of the universal scope of the divine influence. However, since every real being retains some power of its own to act, God cannot guarantee any particular configuration of creaturely decisions that make up the universe. This is part of the reason that Hartshorne agrees with Whitehead and Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948) that there can be tragedy even for God. Any suffering that befalls the creatures is also felt (and known by) God. The other reason that tragedy is possible for God is because on Hartshorne's theology, unlike traditional theology, God is not impassible—God is affected by what happens in the world.

Hartshorne's evolutionary perspective also brings with it a commitment to *a metaphysical structure to value*. The only way in which greater achievement of value is possible is with greater risks of failure to achieve that value. The source of both possibilities is high levels of freedom. The very minds capable of producing or appreciating the surpassing beauty of a symphony are also the minds capable of producing and even relishing horrific cruelty. Where any merely localized individual is concerned, the opportunity for good is necessarily accompanied by the risk of evil. Hartshorne argues that the only way God would be able to avoid a world with suffering is to create no world at all. The power of creativity brings with it the risk—even the inevitability—that things will not always happen for the best.

One may ask Hartshorne whether God is capable of doing evil since, as he claims, high levels of freedom involve the possibility of doing greater good but also doing greater evil. Hartshorne argues that the possibility of having ill-will or destructive tendencies towards another is related to the other being part of one's external environment. Insofar as no creature is external to God and all creatures comprise the divine body, there can be no basis for God to envy them or have competitive conflict with them.¹⁶ In the case of the relation of God to the creatures, there must be a perfect coincidence between self-interest and interest in others. As the well-being of the members of one's own body contributes to the well-being of the person whose body it is, so the enjoyment of the creatures

¹⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953): 137-138.

contributes to the enjoyment of God, but equally, their suffering is felt by God—this is the explanation of why there can be tragedy even for God.

Another criticism of Hartshorne's position is that, in the creaturely case, one's own body can be plagued by disease as when the growth of a cancer threatens one's well-being and even one's existence. Would the suffering of the creatures not also affect God in this way? Once again, however, the categorical difference between God and the creatures makes all the difference. The cancer affects our well-being in large measure because it threatens our ability to survive, which is related to the fact that we have an external environment. Having no external environment, God's existence cannot be threatened for there is literally nothing that could threaten it.

Hartshorne is critical of the claim that everything happens for a reason. There are a couple of ways in which everything could happen for a reason. One way is if God directed every non-divine decision by a providential purpose, like programming a cosmic machine to yield a certain result. This presupposes the monopolistic view of divine power that Hartshorne rejects. The other way is if every creature in the universe fully cooperated with every other creature and with God. But this is also impossible since no individual, apart from God, could be fully aware of what every other individual is doing (as we have seen above, to be a creature is to be limited in one's scope of influence). If one agrees with Hartshorne's critique of the traditional view of omnipotence and with his view of multiple degrees of creativity in the creatures distributed throughout the universe, then it is difficult to see how it could be the case that everything happens for a reason.

Although Hartshorne's theory does not allow one to say that everything happens for a purpose, it does allow one to say that anything can serve a purpose in one's life. Many are the tales of heroic figures who, because of some tragedy, resolved to rid the world of some of the suffering that disfigures it. For example, Christopher Reeve (who played Superman in the movies) fell from his horse and was paralyzed from his neck down for the remainder of his life. After that, he used his energies until the day he died to promote research into spinal injuries. In order to appreciate the significance of Reeve's activities, it is not necessary to say that he fell from his horse *in order* to be an advocate for more spinal injury research. In other words, his injury was really an accident. But what he did with that injury was no accident. On Hartshorne's view, tragedy is not a call for us to rationalize—finding reasons where none exist—but a call to respond creatively, and to resolve to bring some good from it. Where talk of life's meaning is concerned, Hartshorne's views encourage one to be future oriented rather than past oriented.

There are three observations that Hartshorne makes that are directly relevant to the “nature, red in tooth and claw” problem. First, one may ask whether a life cut short or marred by great suffering is worth the trouble. If, by some impossibility, we had a choice between never having been born or living with the risk of suffering, what would we choose? What should we choose? Hartshorne considers the answer to be obvious: choose life, with all of its risks and opportunities. Second, are human goods the only goods? Hartshorne answers no. Whether or not human beings ever existed, it was a good thing for the dinosaurs (for example) to exist, for it was *a good for them*. Finally, are lives,

even lives involving suffering, on balance good or bad? Again, Hartshorne considers the answer to be that life, on balance, is good, even when it involves suffering. These observations are not meant to minimize what is sometimes called unbearable suffering—there is the despair of severe depression, for example, that can lead to suicide. At the global level, there is the threat of human freedom making the planet uninhabitable by unwisely using the earth's resources, and paradoxically, by failing to curb population growth. Hartshorne allows himself expressions of doubt on such matters. He speaks of the “perilous experiment” of the evolution of creatures like human beings that are free of instinctive guidance. Hartshorne reflects: “Was the experiment too dangerous? As a theist I accept on faith the infallible wisdom and ideal power of God. But if I play at criticizing God it is at this point” (p. 126).¹⁷

¹⁷ In the last of his books published during his lifetime, Hartshorne called human beings, as a group, the “bullies of the planet” because of our wholesale destruction of the environment, our penchant for driving other species to extinction, and our cruelty to each other on a mass scale. He asked whether the “billions of other solar systems out of our reach” was a providential arrangement. Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*, edited by Mohammad Valady (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997), see pages 222 and 214.